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ABSTRACT

Two aspects of the role of television programming in classroom instruction--extent of use and instructional functions for use--are discussed with particular attention to the factors that influence these roles and changes that might occur in the future in the Province of Ontario. The evidence presented indicates that television is presently playing an important role in Ontario classrooms where the availability of educational television equipment and curriculum relevant programming, as well as the level of acceptance within the educational community, contributes to a favorable climate for utilization. Favorable attitudes, or acceptance, seem to be related to being informed about the use of television, while its functional role in the classroom is determined by the design of the program. A significant proportion of the instructional television programs available to teachers in Ontario provide a total system consisting of teacher guides, student guides, records, tapes, song books, coloring books, posters, and activity books. This system is made available as an integral unit, and becomes a curriculum determining, rather than a curriculum supporting resource. (JEG)

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THE ROLE OF TELEVISION PROGRAMMING IN CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

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INTRODUCTION

Researchers studying the role of television programming in classroom instruction, are frequently required to distinguish between two aspects of this 'role'. These are:

a) the EXTENT to which teachers utilize television in classroom instruction. That is, how strong a role television plays in relation to other modes of instruction, and

b) the instructional FUNCTIONS for which teachers employ television programming in classroom instruction.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss these two aspects of the role of television programming in classroom instruction with particular attention to the factors that appear to influence the relative role of television, in both senses, and to what changes we might expect in coming years in the role of television programming.

To What Extent is Television Used in Classroom Instruction?

The role of television in classroom instruction is, in the first sense, the EXTENT to which television is being used in classroom instruction. The data available is for classrooms within the Province of Ontario. It must reasonably be said that, in general, teachers within Ontario enjoy a highly favourable climate in which to integrate television into their teaching. As such, the indicators which follow are probably more likely indicators of the role that television is in the near future to play within the

classrooms of other provinces. Nevertheless, for classrooms within Ontario, the following indicators regarding the extent to which television is used in classroom instruction apply:

1. It has been estimated that at one time or another, 88% of Ontario elementary school teachers and 74% of secondary school teachers have used educational television programming in their classrooms.
2. In 1977, educational television was used in 85% of the elementary schools and 92% of the secondary schools in the province.
3. In 1977, 43% of elementary teachers and 28% of secondary school teachers in the province reported using television in their classrooms once or more a month.
4. Elementary school use of educational television amounts to 87% of all inschool use of the medium. Eighty per cent of all use is concentrated at the preschool to grade 6 level.
5. Within Ontario elementary schools, a majority of educational television use is via broadcast reception (69%) whereas, within Ontario secondary schools, a majority of ETV use is via a videotape replay (93%).
6. It has been estimated that 24% of Ontario elementary school teachers could be defined as regular users of educational television to the extent that they use the medium in their teaching once or more a week.

In short, there is considerable evidence that television is playing an important role in Ontario classrooms as indicated by the extent to which it is being utilized (the above figures are taken from Hoichberg, 1977). These figures demonstrating the extent to which television is being used in Ontario classrooms are comparable with evidence on the extent to which

television is being used in other similar educational television environments (see Dirr and Pedone, 1978). The evidence is very clearly that teachers will respond within a favourable educational television environment by assigning a relatively important role, in terms of extent of use, to this particular instructional resource.

The question which might follow from this statement is, "What factors, in particular, contribute to a favourable climate for the classroom utilization of educational television?" The factors can be defined in two broad categories:

a) The availability of educational television equipment and curriculum-relevant programming.
b) The attitude or level of acceptance of educational television within the educational community.

The availability of educational television equipment and curriculum-relevant programming is the single most important factor in determining the extent to which educational television will be used in classroom instruction. Ontario boards of education vary dramatically in the extent to which they provide teachers accessibility to educational television equipment and nonbroadcast sources of curriculum-relevant ETV programming. The time required for a teacher to access nonbroadcast instructional television materials (through accessing educational television equipment and programming) varies among boards of education from thirty seconds to two weeks. This variability among boards in teacher accessibility to programming and equipment has associated with it a corresponding variability in the extent

to which television is used in classroom instruction (as measured by the proportion of teachers within the board using television and the frequency with which these teachers use television), (see Nickerson et al., OECA, 1976-78).

The second major group of factors influencing the extent to which television is used in the classroom involves the attitude or acceptance within the educational community toward the use of television. The influence of this level of acceptance extends throughout the educational community. That is, we refer not only to the attitude of teachers toward the use of television, but also to that of the school principal (the major change agent within the school environment) and school board administration (the group who hold responsibility for committing resources to the use of the medium within their board). The data to be presented related to the levels of acceptance for television use within the educational community are for the Province of Ontario. There is considerable evidence, however, that these findings are generalizable to other educational communities (see Midson, 1975, and Dirr and Pedone, 1978).

What are the attitudes of Ontario teachers toward the use of television in their classrooms? In November, 1976, OECA employed an extensive attitude survey of 790 elementary schools, and 196 secondary schools as part of its ongoing investigation of this question. (Gillis & Nickerson, 1977.) For purposes of analysis, the teachers were divided into three distinct television related utilization groups as follows:

1. teachers who had never used television in their teaching.
2. Teachers who had used television in their teaching but had discontinued its use.

3. Teachers who continue to use television in their teaching.

Major findings regarding the ETV related attitudes of these three groups included the following:

1. A much larger proportion of current users of television (41%) than either discontinuers (20%) or nonusers (16%) regarded television as a unique teaching tool that should become an integral part of the classroom teaching process.
2. Among current users of television, in an analysis of type of television use (off-air, videotape, or both) by ETV related attitude, users of both off-air and videotape held more favourable attitudes than off-air users. In turn, off-air users held more favourable attitudes than videotape users.
3. In an analysis of attitude by utilization group, trends were noted for current users of television to hold more favourable attitudes than discontinuers and for discontinuers to in turn hold more favourable attitudes than non-users. The differences in attitude between current users and discontinuers were, however, far larger than those between discontinuers and non-users.
4. Results of an analysis of ETV-related attitudes by non-utilization group (discontinuers versus non-users) indicated that discontinuers and non-users are clearly distinguishable in their attitudes toward educational television. Discontinuers hold more favourable attitudes toward television and tend to base these attitudes on previous experience in using the resource. Non-users, in contrast, view ETV less favourably and are less able to identify the basis of their

attitude.

5. The results of an analysis of reasons for not using television indicated that discontinuers have ceased using television in their teaching for reasons largely of a logistical nature (i.e., lack of information on programming and insufficient equipment). These reasons for not using television are commonly cited by non-users as well. However, non-users can be distinguished from discontinuers in that non-users appear less familiar with the objectives of using television in the teaching/learning process and are subsequently less convinced of the resources' pedagogical value.
6. When questioned on which of several alternatives would be most influential in encouraging them to adopt videotape television, the largest proportion of discontinuers (38%) indicated they needed improved availability of equipment and programming while the largest proportion of non-users (34%) indicated they needed to be convinced that the benefits derived from adopting videotape are worth the time and trouble involved.
7. A vast majority of both discontinuers and non-users reported they had never sought assistance from administration with regard to the use of television.

The environment in which teachers utilize television in most boards of education within this province has changed dramatically over the last five years. As such, it is not unreasonable to propose that the only teaching group basing their attitudes on the actual facts of current educational television environments are those in constant contact with it.--that is, the current users of television. Those teachers who have not

used television over the past few years and have based their attitudes regarding television use on the state of the television environment when they last used television, are probably misperceiving the current television environment in which teachers in Ontario use television within the classroom. Those teachers who have never used television clearly remain to be convinced of its potential benefits in the classroom.

Teacher attitude, however, is only one aspect of television acceptance within the educational community. Individual schools are the bases of the media environments within Ontario Boards of Education. Within the school the principal is a highly effective change agent. Thus, the attitude of the principal toward the use of ETV becomes an important factor in determining the extent to which television is used in the classroom.

In recognition of this fact, and as part of the ongoing investigation of teacher utilization of television within Ontario schools, the OECA conducted a detailed attitude survey among 1,000 Ontario school principals at the elementary and secondary levels (Nickerson, 1977).

Among the major findings of this study were the following:

1. It was estimated that approximately two-thirds of the principals in elementary schools and one-half of the principals in secondary schools were favourably committed in a 'change agent' sense, to the use of educational television within their schools.
2. The two most frequently mentioned sources of information on which attitudes were based, were conversations with teachers who had used ETV and past personal experience in using the medium.

3. There was a tendency for principals who reported conversations with other principals or administrators as a basis of attitude to hold attitudes which would be described as "middle of the road", whereas, there was a tendency for those reporting reading about ETV to hold comparatively favourable attitudes toward the use of the medium.
4. Principals regard themselves as highly effective 'change agents' in the role of promoting educational television within their schools. When principals were asked to rank order ten factors regarding their influence on teacher use of television, most importance was placed on obvious logistical factors of teacher television use.(equipment availability, program availability, etc.) A second level of importance was assigned to an individual teacher's personal attitude related to the use of media, activity within the school media environment, and the principal as a 'change agent'. Lesser importance was assigned to active promotion through human resources or print resources and to the influence of administration outside of the school media environment.

Again, as with the case of teachers, there would appear to be a relationship between being well informed concerning the use of television and holding favourable attitudes toward the use of television. It is probably not unreasonable to propose that throughout the educational community, including administration, members well informed concerning the potential role of television usually hold favourable attitudes toward its use in the classroom and thus contribute to television playing a more extensive role in the teaching-learning process. When well informed members of the educational community are in sufficient number, and when television utilization equipment and curriculum-relevant programming is available, the extent to

which television contributes to the teaching-learning process within the classroom will increase.

What Instructional Function Does Television Play in the Classroom?

The most effective cost-efficient research on educational programming for use in the classroom is conducted during the development of such programming. This is called Formative Evaluation. It begins with the development of the rough concept for an instructional resource and ends in completion of the resource.

The concerns or perhaps goals and directions, of such formative evaluators during the production of educational television programming can be divided into three basic categories. These researchers are concerned that such educational programming

a) be instructionally effective. That is, the concern is that the program is developed to fulfill the instructional function it was initially designed to do.

b) Be appealing for the target audience. That is, all students bring to the classroom certain expectation regarding television. Among these is the expectation that television entertains. As such, the most effective instructional programming must also entertain.

c) Be consistent with the mode in which teachers normally use an instructional resource in this functional role. Television programming is able to fulfill some instructional functions better than others. The specific instructional function (e.g., specifically instructional, supplemental--motivational, etc.) must be deliberately designed and thoroughly researched to be consistent with teacher needs.

Within this perspective, the function of television in the classroom teaching process becomes the meaning of the role of television in the classroom. A single factor, the design of the television program, determines this functional role of television in the classroom. It has been consistently demonstrated in recent years, that the design of effective instructional programming for use in the classroom must be based on a thorough understanding, through formative research, of the teacher-student needs specific to these particular teaching-learning situations. Producers of educational television programming have developed a thorough appreciation for the strengths and weaknesses of television as an instructional resource intended for classroom use. This may be what makes the instructional programming of today so different than that produced five years ago.

The most effective television programming intended for classroom use does not purport to do all things, but instead fulfills a particular functional role along with other instructional resources (teacher guides, student workbooks, activities, etc.) to provide a total system-A LEARNING SYSTEM. Many innovative teachers recognize the specialized role of the television component and gather together other resources in other specialized roles to provide their students with a total learning system. A significant proportion of the instructional television programming available to teachers in this province, attempts to provide the teacher with as much assistance as possible in providing students with this total system. That is, teachers may have access to teacher guides, student guides, records, tapes, song books,colouring books, posters and activity books, in addition to a body of instructional television programming. The total system is

made available as an integral unit and becomes, in a sense, a curriculum-determining resource rather than a curriculum-supporting resource.

CONCLUSION

It is in this direction that a portion of instructional television programming designed for classroom use is now heading. As such, while the role of television in the sense of the extent to which it is used in the classroom is likely to broaden, the functional role of television programming in the classroom will likely narrow in that it will become highly specialized and much more integrable with other learning resources.

R.B. Nickerson
Toronto, 1978

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